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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 002327

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND DRL/PHD  
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SUBJECT: HONDURAN ELECTIONS NEWS: UPDATE 13

REF: (A) Tegucigalpa 2253 and previous

(B) Tegucigalpa 1968

Voter List: Nearly 4 Million People Eligible to Vote  
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1. 3,976,549 Honduran citizens are eligible to vote in the November 27 general elections; over one (1) million higher than the electoral roll in 2001. On October 21, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) presented copies of the electoral census to the political parties during a special ceremony. The TSE had not been able to formally handover the census previously because the National Registry of Persons (RNP), the organization charged with validating the electoral list of eligible voters, had not completed the process of updating the list. Besides adding new voters, the RNP removed roughly 100,000 citizens from the electoral roll, disenfranchised in accordance with electoral law. Categories of persons deleted from the list included the deceased, members of the Armed Forces and the National Police, and those voters who had committed certain crimes during the previous four years. The TSE plans to operate 5,312 voting centers with nearly 14,000

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electoral tables (each manned by a representative from each of the five parties) in the 18 departments of the country.

2. 11,590 Hondurans, the majority of whom reside in the United States, registered to vote from abroad. Accordingly, 36 electoral tables will be in operation on Election Day at five Honduran Consulates: Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, New York, and Washington, D.C. TSE personnel and magistrates traveled to those cities recently to finalize arrangements and to train consular personnel. For the 2001 general elections, over 8,000 Hondurans registered to vote in the U.S., however only 4,541 people actually voted.

Congressional Candidate "Combos" Undermine Party Unity  
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3. A new phenomenon presenting itself as a result of recent changes in the electoral law is the formation of intra-party "Combos" to advance a given subset of a party's slate of congressional candidates, even at the expense of other candidates from the party (ref B). Members of Congress are elected at-large from each of the eighteen departments. In previous elections, each party rank ordered their candidates from top to bottom. How well the party fared during the election would determine how far down the slate the party could go: candidate number one was likely to be sent to Congress while a candidate at the bottom of the slate stood almost no chance. However, with this national election, the party list system has been abandoned and the voters can select whomever they want, regardless of the positional rank of the candidate.

4. Not unsurprisingly therefore, groups of congressional candidates from the same party are joining together to pool resources to advance themselves as opposed to the entire slate. Interestingly, it appears that the "Combos" are not being formed along ideological lines or even from residual candidates from one of the intra-party primary election movements who successfully advanced to the general election. Instead, these formations appear to be entirely driven by practical aims and, some say, cynical considerations of personal ambition. One additional goal of the "Combos" appears to be to undermine candidates who were top voter getters in the party's primary election. Thus far, the "Combo" phenomenon affects only the two major parties. The National Party presidential candidate, Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo, and his Liberal Party challenger, Manuel "Mel" Zelaya, have condemned the practice, but the "Combos" continue in operation.

5. The largest group in operation is "Combo Chorizo - The Combo of the People," a grouping of 13 of the 23 Liberal Party candidates for Congress from the Department of Francisco Morazan, home to Tegucigalpa. According to accusations registered with the Executive Council of the Liberal Party, "Combo Chorizo," headed by Candidate Jack Arevalo, is actively sabotaging fellow Liberal Party congressional candidates during party rallies and at other

campaign functions. Critics contend that members of the Arevalo group, which includes Lino Tomas Mendoza, Pedro Molina, Mauricio Mendoza, and Alejandra Alvarenga, hired a group of 20 "activists" who dedicate themselves to disrupting the rallies and campaign activities of other Liberal Party candidates. Their tactics reportedly involve debating with bystanders, making excessive noise, throwing objects, being disrespectful, etc. The "activists" have allegedly interfered with candidates at various campaign activities throughout Tegucigalpa and have even followed certain candidates to events in other venues outside of the capital.

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